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ABSTRACT

Working from a knowledge gap hypothesis stating that as amounts of information in a community or society increase, segments of the population with more education and higher socioeconomic status acquire this information at a greater rate than do lower status groups, a study examined the contributions to neighborhood residents' knowledge of local affairs issues. The Phillips neighborhood, a large, predominantly low-income and working-class neighborhood in south Minneapolis, Minnesota, was selected for study. A random sample of 239 residents was interviewed and asked to name and rank the most important neighborhood problems. Their responses were compared to local issues identified by city planners and neighborhood leaders. Content of the two neighborhood newspapers was analyzed for coverage of the issues. Other analyzed variables included involvement in groups specifically concerned with the issues, personal experience, interest, and education. Data analysis supported the knowledge gap hypothesis. It was also noted that neither reading the neighborhood papers nor participating in groups compensated for lack of education. Even though participation and local press readership led to knowledge gains for the less educated, the more educated were able to make even greater gains. (HOD)

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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND THE KNOWLEDGE GAP: SOME INFLUENCES ON KNOWLEDGE DISPARITIES

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ABSTRACT:

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND THE KNOWLEDGE GAP:

SOME INFLUENCES ON KNOWLEDGE DISPARITIES

The purpose of this paper is to provide some insights into factors which may reduce or increase knowledge gaps. The report focuses on two information sources which were widely distributed in an urban inner-city neighborhood: neighborhood newspapers and participation in any type of organization.

Although neighborhood newspapers and participation appeared to contribute to respondents' knowledge of four public affairs issues, they also increased knowledge gaps between the more and less educated respondents.

Major predictors of knowledge were: (1) involvement with groups concerned with the issues, (2) experience, (3) interest, and (4) education. Because the first three variables were related to education, knowledge acquisition appears to be restricted by characteristics of social structure, particularly the way society is stratified.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND THE KNOWLEDGE GAP:

SOME INFLUENCES ON KNOWLEDGE DISPARITIES

The knowledge gap phenomenon is not merely an information gap or a differential due only to communication effects.[1] It is part of a gap between well-bounded social strata, and it reflects disparities in information as one among many resources which are less available to lower socioeconomic groups.

Differentials in information sources are outcomes of the social system of stratification.[2] Among elements accounting for stratification are education, occupational prestige, kinship position, ethnic group membership, power, and status (Barber, 1968). The dimensions of stratification are interrelated (Lipset, 1968). They are also related to inequalities in knowledge (Kanervo, 1979; McNelly, 1973).

Social stratification functions to increase knowledge disparities between the haves and the have-nots. A knowledge gap hypothesis, supported by empirical data, states that as amounts of information in a community or a society increase, segments of the population which have more education and higher socioeconomic status (SES) tend to acquire this information at a greater rate than do lower status groups, although the latter do make information gains. Therefore, the gap in amount of knowledge held by higher and lower SES segments tends to increase rather than decrease (Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, 1970).

Knowledge gaps do not always occur, however, under certain conditions, and they may be reduced under some conditions (Brown, Ettema, and

Luepker, 1981; Genova and Greenberg, 1979; Tichenor, et al, 1973, 1980; Donohue, et al, 1975; Shingi and Mody, 1976; Galloway, 1977).

The purpose of this paper is to describe differentials in information sources and to present research data which provide some insights into factors which may reduce or increase knowledge differentials.

DISTRIBUTION OF KNOWLEDGE SOURCES

The major sources of knowledge in the United States are formal schooling, interpersonal contacts, organization membership, and mass media use and access. All of these sources are distributed differentially within U.S. society.

Education indicates membership in a particular social stratum. The boundaries between social strata inhibit the flow of knowledge in society. These boundaries are formed not only by differences in education which are associated with differences in lifestyle, communication contacts, occupation, power, and prestige; they are reinforced also by differences in norms, values, behavior, and culture (Samuelson, Carter, and Ruggels, 1963; Barber, 1968; Childers with Post, 1975).

> In today's credential society, which places heavy emphasis on educational attainment for entrance into higher-level occupations, education becomes a crucial dimension in social stratification . . . . The importance of education is illustrated by Wilensky's and Duncan's findings that it is the only variable that consistently ranks all the white-collar strata above each of the manual and farm strata . . . . (Miller and Roby, 1969:71).

Level of education affects the amount of information and the accuracy of information received through personal contacts. The less educated tend to talk with each other and to interact less with more knowledgeable, higher status individuals (Troldahl and Van Dam, 1965-66). Primary groups, such as those based on work, friendship, neighborhoods,

and kinship, tend to be stratified along SES lines (Rossi and Blum, 1969).

Possessing a low level of education may affect interpersonal information access indirectly because educational attainment influences how bureaucracies, groups, and individuals perceive people (Miller and Roby, 1969:71): "An individual with inadequate education is an outsider, less able to take advantage of the opportunities that exist, and is treated less well than those with the same income but a higher education."

Members of organizations tend to be better educated and of higher status than non-members (Milbrath and Goel, 1977). Organized groups are often a major source of various kinds of information for their participants, and they often have "regularized sets of mechanisms" for communicating with decision-makers (Nie, 1970:223).

SES characteristics are related to language use and literacy. Differentials in family environment and in experiences with the school system combine to reinforce SES differences in reading and speech skills, in the ability to comprehend and to like "serious" content, and to grow intellectually (Blum and Rossi, 1969; Deutsch, 1965).

These differences influence patterns of media use. Lower SES individuals tend to use newspapers and magazines less than high SES persons. Those with lower status and education do use television and radio, sometimes more than those of higher SES, but they are less likely to attend to broadcast content about complex issues than are higher SES persons. High use of television content which is often superficial consigns the disadvantaged to an information void (Dervin and Greenberg, 1972). When content is shallow, better educated people are more able to make sense out of it than are the less educated (Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien, 1973).

Print media tend to emphasize high SES-oriented content, to discuss abstract ideas, and to use complex terminology. These characteristics appeal more to better educated persons and are more comprehensible to them than to the poorly educated (Suominen, 1976). For awhile, some newspapers heeded the admonitions of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to try to communicate better to low-income and minority audiences (Midura, 1971), but they have now lost interest in covering the inner city and the disadvantaged (Heisler, 1971).

Access to media is distributed unequally within society. Although television and radio are found in virtually every U.S. household today, print media are less universally available. Books, magazines, and newspapers are subject to increasingly higher costs of production, supplies, and distribution. Bought by the copy or by the subscription, they may seem more expensive in comparison to broadcast media (which tend to be viewed as a "one-time" expense) or to other consumer products. Newspapers also experience distribution difficulties in inner cities, which increasingly are inhabited by lower SES groups (Bogart, 1975). Newspapers and magazines have now largely abandoned attempts to reach the poor in favor of seeking more lucrative audiences (Bagdikian, 1981). Further, distribution systems of newspapers are based on the most stable, advantaged, and influential segments of communities as represented by home ownership.

MEDIA WITH A NON-TRADITIONAL STRUCTURE

The relatively recent development of a type of print media with structural characteristics different from many traditional print media raises questions about the potential of the newer media to contribute

to reductions in knowledge disparities.

During the past two decades, urban public affairs-oriented neighborhood newspapers have been reported in a number of areas.[3] Major characteristics which differentiate the neighborhood press from more traditional papers are non-profit status, volunteer or low-paid staffs, and circulation on the basis of neighborhood residence rather than advertiser-oriented or economic bases (Ward and Gaziano, 1976).[4] Editors and reporters for these papers tend to be non-elites and sometimes their news perspectives are contrary to "establishment" orientations on issues.[5] These papers often are governed by a board of neighborhood residents; however, the papers sometimes are linked to residents' organizations. Residents' associations are more likely to include homeowners than renters, although the papers may maintain an anti-landlord tone. Some neighborhood papers developed in low-income neighborhoods in response to social action movements led by citizens, and some developed out of programs connected with Model Cities or the Office of Economic Opportunity (Frankovich, 1974; Conason, 1975; Gaziano, 1974; City Almanac, 1969).

Neighborhood newspapers often address the concerns of the disadvantaged in their reporting of local public affairs issues. Groups which frequently are not reached by print media have been shown to be familiar with and to use some neighborhood newspapers in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul (Gaziano, 1974; Gaziano and Ward, 1978). Many of the Twin Cities neighborhood papers are specifically oriented to their audiences, including the poor, minority groups, and the elderly.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of the study reported is to examine the contributions

to neighborhood residents' knowledge of local public affairs issues made by neighborhood newspapers. Does reporting by these papers reduce or widen gaps in knowledge of these issues? The research goal is also to study the influence of other major sources of information, such as daily newspapers, local magazines, and broadcast media, as well as participation in organized groups, informal personal contacts, and personal experience with issues.

Other variables may also be relevant, such as interest in issues,[6] presence of issues in neighborhood residents' agendas,[7] attachment to the neighborhood,[8] length of residence, and demographic characteristics.

METHODOLOGY

The Phillips neighborhood, a large, predominantly low-income and working-class neighborhood in south Minneapolis, was selected for study. It is served by its own non-profit neighborhood newspaper, The Alley, with a circulation of 10,000. At the time of the study, The Alley was distributed free at many local businesses, high rise apartment buildings, and local institutions. It now has door-to-door distribution as well. A second neighborhood newspaper, Southside News, was mailed to 42,000 households in Phillips and eight adjacent neighborhoods. Although Southside News was semi-monthly, residents received one free issue per month and the second issue only if they paid a subscription fee. The Alley is financed by advertising, and Southside News relied on advertising, federal subsidy, and foundation grants. It ceased publication after the study had ended because of lack of funds.

SELECTION OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS ISSUES

Local issues of potential interest to low SES residents were

selected after interviews with city planners and some neighborhood leaders. The issues were chosen also to reflect varying levels of neighborhood newspaper publicity and activity of organized groups on the issues. The four issues are housing, crime, schools, and economic development.

SAMPLE SELECTION, INTERVIEWING, AND OTHER MEASUREMENT

The research population consisted of all telephone households in the neighborhood, a household being a single residential listing in a street address telephone directory. A random sample of 239 residents was interviewed by telephone between mid-March and the first week of April 1980.[9] A letter describing the study and requesting cooperation preceded contacts. Interviews were completed among 68 percent of contacts with eligible members of the sample.[10]

Respondents were asked to name the most important neighborhood problems and to rank them.[11] The issues mentioned were considered to be the respondents' agendas of important topics. They were then asked whether or not they had seen or heard anything about the housing issue. If so, they were asked about persons or groups active on the issue, its causes, its solutions, respondents' personal experiences with the issue, their participation in groups concerned about the issue, and their interest in the issue.[12] Questions followed this format for the other three issues. All knowledge questions were open-ended. It has been argued that respondents should define knowledge in their own terms with open-ended questions in order to minimize bias introduced by the investigator (Edelstein, 1973; Clarke and Kline, 1974; Palmgreen, 1979). Knowledge scores were computed for each respondent by summing up the

number of all discrete elements of information mentioned by each respondent.[13] These scores represent depth knowledge. Data were analyzed also by proportions of respondents who had any knowledge at all about issues, conceptualized as awareness knowledge.

Content of all issues of the two neighborhood newspapers was analyzed for the period of November 1979 to mid-March 1980. Housing was by far the most publicized issue in both papers. Economic development ranked second in overall coverage, and schools[14] was third. Crime clearly was the least reported subject during this period.[15]

Amount of activity on each issue by organizations was measured by number of respondent mentions of groups or individuals active on the issue. Neighborhood residents perceived greatest activity on the crime issue and the next greatest activity on housing.[16]

Level of formal education was the indicator of respondent socio-economic status. Those with less than a high school degree are termed the low education group, those graduating from high school constitute the medium education group, and those having some college or more comprise the high education group.

RESULTS

The following analyses help to provide some insights into variables which influence knowledge differentials. Of particular interest are neighborhood newspaper readership and participation in organizations. Some previous research has focused on knowledge gaps as a condition of a process that involves the joint occurrences of education levels, organized group activities, and neighborhood newspaper publicity (Gaziano, 1982). This research raises questions about the individual contributions to knowledge levels and knowledge gaps made by neighborhood

newspaper reading and participation in organizations.

Two kinds of comparisons are made in tables 1 through 4, which present the mean knowledge scores of the three education groups, contrasting readership with non-readership and participation with non-participation. These analyses focus on depth knowledge.

First, compare readership with non-readership within each education group (that is, compare cell A with cell B, cell C with D, and E with F). In every comparison except one, readers of either neighborhood newspaper have a higher mean knowledge score than those in the same educational level who do not read the paper (Tables 1 and 2). The exception is low education readers of Southside News with school knowledge scores.

Second, compare (1) scores of readers among the low education group with scores of non-readers among the moderate education group, and (2) scores of the middle group who are readers with scores of the most educated non-readers (cell A with D, C with F). In every instance but three, readers exhibit higher scores than those of the next most educated group who do not read the papers. The modest exceptions are for Southside readers. Readership of these two neighborhood newspapers appears to increase average knowledge scores of the two less educated groups to levels comparable to, or greater than, the non-readers in the next highest education group.

Third, compare the difference in scores, or gap, between the high and low education groups among readers and among non-readers. In three out of four comparisons for each paper, the gap is larger for readers than for non-readers. Therefore, these data support the knowledge gap hypothesis that the greater the media publicity (or exposure to publicity in this case), the greater the knowledge gap (Tichenor, Donohue, and

Table 1. Knowledge scores and readership of The Alley by issue.*

1. HOUSING ISSUE			2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUE		
Education	Read Alley	Do not read Alley	Education	Read Alley	Do not read Alley
Low**	A 1.83 (N=36)	B 1.25 (N=12)	Low	A 1.06 (N=36)	B .83 (N=12)
Medium	C 3.53 (N=34)	D 1.62 (N=26)	Medium	C 1.24 (N=34)	D .58 (N=26)
High	E 4.42 (N=74)	F 2.44 (N=48)	High	E 2.09 (N=74)	F .83 (N=48)
	Gap=2.59	Gap=1.19***		Gap=1.03	Gap=0
3. SCHOOLS ISSUE			4. CRIME ISSUE		
Low	A 1.14 (N=36)	B .83 (N=12)	Low	A 3.50 (N=36)	B 1.75 (N=12)
Medium	C 1.44 (N=34)	D .42 (N=26)	Medium	C 4.56 (N=34)	D 3.31 (N=26)
High	E 2.03 (N=74)	F .94 (N=48)	High	E 5.35 (N=74)	F 4.13 (N=48)
	Gap=.89	Gap=.11		Gap=1.85	Gap=2.38

*N = 230 with 9 observations missing.

**Low education group, N = 48; medium education group, N= 60; high education group, N = 122.

***Gap means the difference between the high education group's average score and the low education group's average score.

Table 2. Knowledge scores and readership of Southside News by issue.*

1. HOUSING ISSUE			2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUE		
Education	Read Southside	Don't read Southside	Education	Read Southside	Don't read Southside
Low**	1.70 (N=40)	1.63 (N=8)	Low	1.05 (N=40)	.75 (N=8)
Medium	3.00 (N=43)	1.94 (N=17)	Medium	1.14 (N=43)	.47 (N=17)
High	4.07 (N=89)	2.48 (N=33)	High	1.97 (N=89)	.61 (N=33)
	Gap=2.37	Gap=.85***		Gap=.92	Gap=-.14
3. SCHOOLS ISSUE			4. CRIME ISSUE		
Low	.85 (N=40)	2.13 (N=8)	Low	3.25 (N=40)	2.13 (N=8)
Medium	1.09 (N=43)	.76 (N=17)	Medium	4.14 (N=43)	3.71 (N=17)
High	1.73 (N=89)	1.24 (N=33)	High	5.33 (N=89)	3.64 (N=33)
	Cap=.88	Gap=-.89		Gap=2.08	Gap=1.51

*N = 230 with 9 observations missing.

**Low education group, N = 48; medium education group, N = 60; high education group, N = 122.

***Gap means the difference between the high education group's average score and the low education group's average score.

Olien, 1970). The gap is largest for the housing issue which had the most neighborhood newspaper coverage. The two largest gaps occur for the two issues attracting the most activity by organizations (housing and crime).

The same comparisons within and between education groups should be made for Table 3, regarding involvement in groups specifically interested in the issues, and Table 4, concerning participation in any type of organization. For each issue, those taking part in groups concerned with these issues have higher scores on the average than non-participants in the same education category. Further, those with less than high school degrees who participate in groups oriented toward the issues have higher scores on the average than high school graduates who are not affiliated with organizations interested in the issues. High school graduates who participate in these organizations have higher average scores than non-participants who have attended college. The number of respondents who have either low or moderate levels of education and take part in groups concerned with the issues studied is small, and these results only suggest that such involvement increases knowledge scores.

However, the same patterns appear also in Table 4, which involves participation in any type of organization, and the number of cases in each cell is high enough to lend confidence to a conclusion that participation contributes to an increase in knowledge scores.

In addition, the gap between scores of the high and low education segments is larger for those involved in groups concerned with the issues or any type of organization than for non-participants.

The results in Tables 1 through 4 indicate that reading neighborhood newspapers and participation in organizations influence knowledge acquisition. Respondents who use any of these news sources have higher

Table 3. Knowledge scores and involvement in groups interested in the issue.*

1. HOUSING ISSUE			2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUE		
Education	Involved in interested group	Not involved in group	Education	Involved in interested group	Not involved in group
Low**	3.33 (N=6)	1.45 (N=42)	Low	3.50 (N=4)	.77 (N=44)
Medium	5.86 (N=7)	2.28 (N=53)	Medium	3.80 (N=5)	.69 (N=55)
High	7.57 (N=23)	2.73 (N=99)	High	6.33 (N=9)	1.22 (N=113)
	Gap=4.24	Gap=1.28***		Gap=2.83	Gap=.45
3. SCHOOLS ISSUE			4. CRIME ISSUE		
Low	2.75 (N=4)	.91 (N=44)	Low	4.63 (N=8)	2.75 (N=40)
Medium	4.00 (N=2)	.90 (N=58)	Medium	5.23 (N=13)	3.68 (N=47)
High	5.20 (N=15)	1.09 (N=107)	High	6.53 (N=30)	4.36 (N=91)
	Gap=2.45	Gap=.18		Gap=1.90	Gap=1.61

*N = 230 with 9 observations missing except for the crime issue, for which N = 229.

**Low education group, N = 48; medium education group, N = 60; high education group, N = 122.

***Gap means the difference between the high education group's average score and the low education group's average score.

Table 4. Knowledge scores and participation in general by issue.*

1. HOUSING ISSUE			2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUE		
Education	Participate	Do not Participate	Education	Participate	Do not Participate
Low**	1.78 (N=27)	1.57 (N=21)	Low	1.33 (N=27)	.57 (N=21)
Medium	3.55 (N=33)	1.67 (N=27)	Medium	1.30 (N=33)	.52 (N=27)
High	5.00 (N=63)	2.19 (N=59)	High	2.22 (N=63)	.93 (N=59)
	Gap=3.22	Gap=.62***		Gap=.89	Gap=.36
3. SCHOOLS ISSUE			4. CRIME ISSUE		
Low	1.30 (N=27)	.76 (N=21)	Low	3.19 (N=27)	2.90 (N=21)
Medium	1.61 (N=33)	.26 (N=27)	Medium	4.67 (N=33)	3.22 (N=27)
High	2.02 (N=63)	1.15 (N=59)	High	5.60 (N=63)	4.08 (N=59)
	Gap=.72	Gap=.39		Gap=2.41	Gap=1.18

*N = 230 with 9 observations missing.

**Low education group, N = 48; medium education group, N = 60; high education group, N = 122.

***Gap means the difference between the high education group's average score and the low education group's average score.

knowledge scores than non-users, and the less educated who use them tend to have higher knowledge scores on the average than do more educated non-users.

Yet, an interesting paradox also occurs. Use of these information sources appears to increase the knowledge gap between more educated and less educated segments, a pattern found consistently in all four tables. Further, the largest knowledge gap appears for the issue which received both the most neighborhood press coverage and the most organized group activity (housing).

Previous research has suggested that these two neighborhood newspapers may have contributed to reduction of awareness knowledge gaps (Gaziano, 1982). The analysis here of depth knowledge gaps indicates that readership of neighborhood newspapers may contribute to widened gaps in depth knowledge. On the other hand, activities of organized groups tend to contribute both to increased awareness knowledge gaps and increased depth knowledge gaps (Gaziano, 1982, 1983).

To illuminate these points, graphs showing depth knowledge scores for the housing issue are given in Figure 1, contrasting neighborhood newspaper readership with non-readership and participation with non-participation. Participation differentially affects knowledge scores as education increases. This occurs also for readership of the neighborhood papers. Neither reading the neighborhood papers nor participation compensates for lack of education. Even when participation and readership occur jointly, the education gap is not eliminated. In fact, the joint occurrence increases the gap between high and low education groups even more (Gaziano, 1983). Even though participation and neighborhood press readership lead to knowledge gains for the less

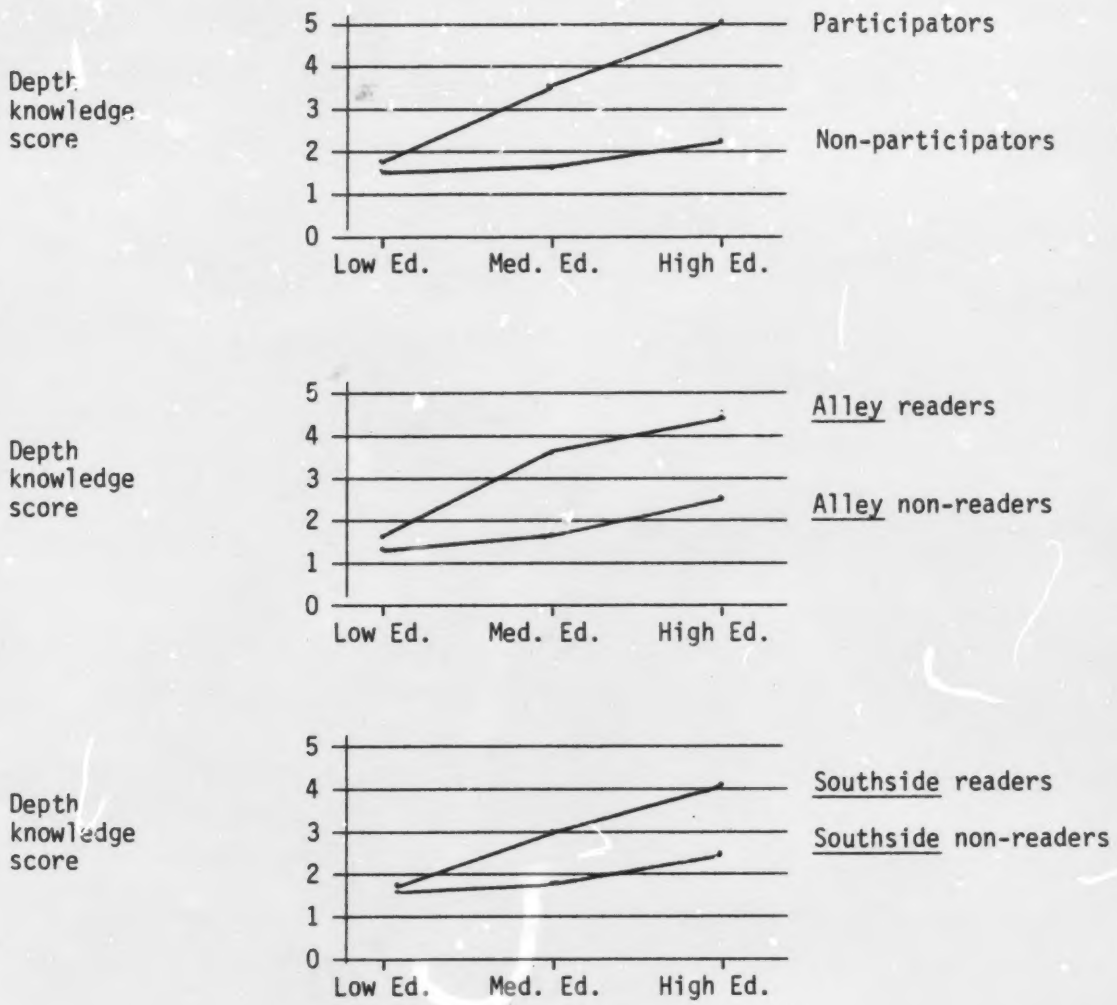

Figure 1. Average depth knowledge scores for the housing issue for each education group, contrasting readership and participation with non-readership and non-participation.

educated, the more educated are able to make even greater gains.

MEDIA AND INTERPERSONAL NEWS SOURCES

Readership of the two neighborhood papers[17] is contrasted with use of other media and interpersonal information sources in Table 5. Neighborhood newspaper use is more equally distributed in the neighborhood than some other print media. Participation in any type of organization also does not depend on level of schooling.[18] How widely distributed is access to other information sources?

Use of Insight, a semi-monthly city-wide paper which covers neighborhood news, does not vary according to educational level. This finding is comparable to those just discussed for The Alley and Southside News, as well as to evidence in other studies of Minnesota community papers (Cobbey, 1980) and a Twin Cities suburban paper (Tichenor and Wackman, 1973). However, reported use of a paper in a nearby neighborhood, Many Corners, which circulates in some parts of Phillips, is much higher among those who have attended college than among those who have not. One potential reason is that Many Corners is oriented toward the University of Minnesota area and reports frequently on arts and literary topics as well as neighborhood issues.

Neighborhood newspaper use patterns also may be compared with those for tabloids aimed at minority groups. Since the minority groups in Phillips tend to have low levels of formal schooling, one might expect that use of these tabloids would be higher among the less educated than among the more educated. This is true only for readership of the Twin Cities Courier, a newspaper for blacks. The Minneapolis Spokesman, another black-oriented paper, and The Circle, a paper for American Indians, seem to appeal more to the better educated. The Circle began

Table 5. Use of information sources by education.*

Education	Read The Alley	Read Southside	Read Insight	Read Many Corners[a]
Low	75%	83%	33%	6%
Medium	57	72	32	3
High	61	73	36	21

	Read Spokesman[b]	Read Courier[b]	Read Circle[c]	Read Daily American[d]
Low	2%	11%	8%	2%
Medium	5	12	8	10
High	11	6	14	7

	Read The Star	Read Tribune	Read local magazines	Read any other local publications
Low	56%	75%	0%	23%
Medium	62	60	2	28
High	45	78	16	42

	Listen to radio news	Watch public affairs news on TV	Participate in organizations[e]	People are helpful news source
Low	63%	65%	56%	71%
Medium	62	67	55	72
High	70	65	52	71

*N = 230 with 9 observations missing. Percentages given are proportions of an education group who report using each information source. Low education, N = 48; medium education, N = 60; high education, N = 122.

[a]Neighborhood newspaper circulating to portions of Phillips.

[b]Black-oriented news tabloid.

[c]American Indian-oriented news tabloid.

[d]Conservative newsletter which circulates by mail, although once sold on newsstands.

[e]Includes residents' group, tenants' associations, ethnic organizations, senior citizens' clubs, block clubs, school-related groups, church-related involvement, citizens' action groups, etc.

as a newsletter and had been a tabloid for only two months at the time of interviewing. The black newspapers have existed for many years. All three papers are distributed throughout the city.

Another comparison may be made with use of a conservative newsletter, the Minneapolis Daily American, which has an office located on the south boundary of the Phillips neighborhood. Like the minority-oriented tabloids and Many Corners, it appears to draw limited readership in Phillips. One reason for a low level of use may be that it is available only by mail subscription, although it once was a daily tabloid sold on newsstands and has existed for approximately two decades. It attracts a little more attention from high school graduates than from the college group but gets scant notice from the least educated group.

Use of the metropolitan daily, The Minneapolis Star,[19] among low and medium education groups is similar to recent national figures for daily newspapers,[20] but it is low for the most educated group. In contrast to the national figures, which show that about three-fourths of those with some college or more read daily newspapers, the most educated in the sample are the least likely to report reading The Star.[21] However, among the moderate and high education groups, levels of reported reading of the other daily, the Minneapolis Tribune, are comparable to the national data. Use of the Tribune among the low education group is higher than one would anticipate, but figures for the Tribune include readership of the more widely distributed Sunday edition, which is the only issue of that paper that many respondents with low education read regularly,[22] and this may explain the disparity. Readership of local magazines (four), Many Corners, the Spokesman, The Circle, and every other publication mentioned by respondents[23] does exhibit the frequently

reported pattern of positive associations between education and print media use.

Reported listening to radio news is a little higher among the most educated group than among the two other education groups, but reported use of television for news and public affairs programs is fairly uniform among all three segments.

Using people as helpful neighborhood news sources does not depend on education.

INTEREST, EXPERIENCE, GROUP INVOLVEMENT, AND AGENDAS

Scrutiny of several other variables facilitates understanding of variations in knowledge among education groups (Table 6).

The low education segment had less involvement with groups concerned with the housing issue, lower interest in that issue, less reported personal experience with housing, and this segment was less likely than the others to name housing in issue agendas. The moderately educated had comparatively less involvement with housing interest groups than the most educated did; otherwise, these two education groups tended to be fairly similar in their interest levels, amount of personal experience, and importance attached to the issue as measured by presence of the issue in agendas.

The least educated demonstrated high awareness of the crime issue, but this was proportionately less than that of the other groups. On the whole, the middle and high education segments had fairly similar levels of interest, experience, involvement with concerned groups, and importance attached to the crime issue. The least educated had somewhat lower levels of these characteristics.

Table 6. Education groups by selected variables, for each issue.*

Level of education	Are aware of issue	Are interested in issue**	Have personal experience	Are involved in interested groups	Name issue in agenda
			HOUSING		
Low	45.8%***	41.7%	12.5%	12.5%	10.4%
Medium	61.7	55.0	28.3	11.7	28.3
High	63.9	55.7	26.2	18.9	27.0
			ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT		
Low	41.7	31.3	4.2	8.3	0
Medium	31.7	28.3	3.3	8.3	3.3
High	43.4	35.2	7.4	7.4	9.8
			SCHOOLS		
Low	33.3	33.3	10.4	8.3	0
Medium	30.0	26.7	13.3	3.3	1.7
High	41.8	34.4	15.6	12.3	6.6
			CRIME		
Low	72.9	70.8	60.4	16.7	25.0
Medium	81.7	78.3	76.7	21.7	45.0
High	88.5	83.6	72.1	24.6	41.8

*N = 230 with 9 observations missing.

**Responses combined for "very interested" and "somewhat interested."

***Percentages are proportions of each education group who have awareness knowledge. Low education group, N = 48; medium education group, N = 60; high education group, N = 122.

With regard to economic development, reported participation in organizations oriented toward that issue is fairly low and at relatively similar levels among all three education segments. All three report fairly low levels of experience and presence of the issue in agendas, although the college group tends to report slightly higher amounts of interest, experience, and importance attached to this issue.

The most educated tend to have more personal experience with the school topic, report more involvement with groups concerned with education, and accord more importance to the issue, as Table 6 shows. These characteristics illustrate the type of social structural access to information that accompanies higher levels of education, and therefore should contribute to higher levels of knowledge among the most educated. Knowledge differences occur in spite of the fact that the low and high segments cited about equal amounts of interest in the issue, with the moderately-educated group displaying less interest.

VARIABLES WHICH PREDICT KNOWLEDGE BEST

Although level of education was a prominent predictor of depth knowledge of every issue, personal experience was an even better predictor in each instance, when stepwise multiple regressions on depth knowledge scores were performed with selected variables as independent variables. These were major media and interpersonal information sources, interest in the issues, and presence of the issues in agendas (data not shown). Involvement in groups concerned with the issues predicted better than education for housing and economic development information, and it was a minor predictor for crime issue knowledge. Interest in issues out-performed education as a knowledge predictor for all issues except

crime, although interest was still important for crime information.

These four variables--experience, interest, involvement in groups specifically concerned with the issues, and education--were present consistently among principal knowledge predictors for the issues, and these four variables together account for about 58 percent to 71 percent of the explained variance in knowledge.

Although participation in any organizations was equally distributed throughout the neighborhood, participation in groups specifically concerned with the issues studied was not equally distributed in the neighborhood, as Table 6 shows.

Experience with the issues and interest in issues were unequally distributed also. Therefore, although many information sources were equally available to all social segments in the neighborhood, crucial information sources and characteristics affecting interest were not widely available in the neighborhood. These variables are related also to the primary indicator of stratification, education level.

Other variables, including length of residence, attachment to the neighborhood, informal supplements to schooling, gender, age, race, and occupation (data not shown) had only a minor influence on knowledge when the effect of the four major predictors is partialled out.

SUMMARY

The principal variables which predict knowledge are: (1) involvement with groups specifically concerned with the issues, (2) personal experience, (3) interest, and (4) education. When less educated respondents were knowledgeable about the issues, this knowledge appeared to have been enhanced by interest, experience, and interest group

involvement, but the less educated were less apt than the more educated to possess these characteristics.

Although many information sources were widely distributed in the neighborhood, the four sources or characteristics most critical to knowledge acquisition were not widely distributed. The influence of other variables on knowledge gain is comparatively minor when the influence of the four major variables is statistically controlled.

This does not mean that other variables are not important for knowledge acquisition. On the contrary, information sources which are widely available to the less educated are vital to their learning about issues because of their lack of access to many major knowledge sources. In this study, these more widely available sources are neighborhood newspapers, participation in any type of organization, and talking to others about local topics.

Readership of neighborhood papers and participation appeared to contribute to knowledge scores of each education group. However, these two information sources not only did not compensate for lack of education, but also they increased the knowledge gap between high and low education segments in the neighborhood.

Levels of interest and importance attached to the issues were higher among the most educated, which may help to account for knowledge differentials. One possible explanation for lower levels of issue interest and perceptions of importance among the less educated is that lower SES persons are less likely than higher SES individuals to define topics as "issues" or "problems" (Childers with Post, 1975), and they are less apt to perceive that they have information needs although outside observers may perceive that they have such needs (Suominen, 1976).

Although the less educated may have encountered problems with housing, crime, or other neighborhood issues, they may not think of these encounters as "personal experience with an issue." They may tend to take these problems for granted as part of their lives over which they have no control. The feeling of lack of control may be partly responsible for the lower incidence of these issues in the agendas of the least educated.

One of the most influential sources of neighborhood issue information may be participation in organizations specifically interested in the issues. Highly educated persons appear to have greater access to these groups. In addition, activity of organized groups is strongly linked to presence of knowledge gaps (Gaziano, 1982, 1983).

When organizations take action on issues and neighborhood papers air information about these issues, talk about them is stimulated. The less educated tend to get information from free-distribution neighborhood newspapers, talking to others, or participation in some types of groups, but higher SES persons have more access to many crucial information sources. Characteristics of the social structure which shape information environment also affect interest in topics.

Knowledge acquisition is restricted by social stratification. When information travels in channels more accessible to higher SES persons, lower SES persons will be relatively unlikely to possess that information. Since characteristics of the social structure affect ability to acquire knowledge, to understand it, and to act on it, much work remains to be done in exploring the effect of stratification on knowledge gaps.

Footnotes

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[2]The concept of social stratification has existed for thousands of years. It has been developed more fully by recent sociologists such as Talcott Parsons, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, according to Barber (1968).

[3]These areas include: New York City; Boston, Lynn, and Lowell, Massachusetts; St. Louis, Missouri; Chicago; Washington, D.C.; Cleveland, Ohio; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; and Ottawa, Canada (City Almanac, 1969; Frankovich, 1974; Gaziano, 1974; Conason, 1975; Ward and Gaziano, 1976; Jeffres and Dobos, 1983).

[4]These papers tend to contrast with the 82 community papers in Janowitz's landmark study (1952). That press, mainly weeklies with paid circulations, avoided controversy and took editorial stands only when it was necessary to communicate the community's concerns to outsiders.

[5]Neighborhood newspapers may or may not have links to elite or business-oriented groups. Their board members and staffs may be affiliated with, or communicate with, many other organizations and institutions in the neighborhood and in the larger community, but these groups and institutions are not necessarily in the community's power structure. Many times they possess low social power but are part of a network of low-power groups which have combined formally or informally to counteract the activities of high power groups and government representatives.

[6]Interest often is associated with knowledge-holding (Genova and Greenberg, 1979; Star and Hughes, 1950).

[7]The issues emphasized by media may lead audiences to attach similar weights of importance to those issues (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). This has been called agenda-setting. An agenda is a roster of important issues.

[8]Community attachment and community identification play a part in media use and thus may influence knowledge-holding (Stephens, 1978; Janowitz, 1952; Stamm and Fortini-Campbell, 1979).

[9]The method was by drawing a random sample of all blocks in the neighborhood with residential units and then by selecting households on the chosen blocks with a proportionate random method. Addresses of all telephone households on the blocks were obtained from a semi-annual street address telephone directory.

[10]Of these, 208 (87%) were white, 13 (5.4%) were American Indian, 8 (3.3%) were black--although three of these were foreign-born, 2 were Hispanic, 1 was Indochinese, and information about race was not known for 7 respondents. The sample was biased toward the better-educated and Caucasians. Although 60% of interviewing was in the evening, 40% of the sample was male and 60% female. The margin of error is ±.06 at the 95% confidence level.

[11]The questions were: What do you think are the most important problems or issues in the Phillips neighborhood? (Probes) Which of these issues would you say is the most important to the neighborhood? (Similar questions until all issues ranked.)

[12]The questions were: Now, I'd like to ask something about the housing problem. Have you seen or heard anything about it in the Phillips neighborhood? (If yes:) Can you tell me what you've seen or heard? (Probes)

Do you know of any people or organizations that have been trying to do something about this problem? (If yes:) Can you tell me something about that?

Do you belong to, or attend any meetings of any groups or organizations which are interested in the housing issue? (If yes:) Which groups are these?

Have you had any personal experience with the housing issue, such as writing or phoning people about it or knowing people who have had trouble with this problem? (If yes:) Can you tell me a little more about that?

What, in your opinion, is the cause of the housing problem in this neighborhood? (Probes)

Do you know of any ways to do something about the housing problem around here? (If yes:) What ways are those?

How interested would you say that you are in the housing problem? Would you say that you are: very interested, somewhat interested, or not interested?

[13]The coefficient of inter-coder agreement for coding both open-ended and closed-ended questions overall was .93.

[14]School-related items were excluded from analysis if they concerned preschools, announcements of adult education classes, schools outside the neighborhood except for parochial schools which include Phillips within their parish boundaries, non-educational topics such as picnic announcements, and a children's page which appears in one paper.

[15]Level of neighborhood newspaper publicity was measured by the number of news items of any type in which an issue was mentioned, both as a dominant topic and as a subordinate subject, and also by the total length of column inches devoted to the issue when it was the primary content area. These measures were approximately equivalent.

[16]Residents emphasized crime most (117 mentions) and housing second (102 mentions). Number of groups cited on the economic development issue was 41, and on the school topic, 28.

[17]Readers of The Alley include 61 percent of all respondents, and 73 percent are Southside readers. Some readership overlaps--57 percent of respondents report use of both papers.

Sixty-nine percent of the low education group report reading both papers, 48 percent of the middle education group report using both, and 52 percent of the high education group said that they read both.

[18]Although much research shows participation to be linked to high education, this relationship does not always occur. Janowitz (1978:304) has pointed out the role of "religious, communal, and ethnic associations which 'mobilized' low-income social groupings" and played a major part in the ascent to power of the Democratic party during the Depression." He stresses also the effectiveness of trade unions and churches as voluntary associations among some blue-collar workers. Churches were important vehicles for political participation among lower-class and middle-class blacks during the civil rights movement from 1950 to 1970 (Oberschall, 1973).

The study reported in this paper used a broad definition of participation that would include organizations that might be favored by less educated respondents as well as more educated ones.

[19]Readership of the afternoon Star on the whole was less than for the morning Tribune. The Star had been declining in circulation for two to three decades, and it merged with the Tribune in spring 1982.

[20]According to 1977 figures from the American Newspaper Publishers Association (Smith, 1980), daily newspaper readership by education is: grade school,51 percent; some high school, 64 percent; high school graduate, 73 percent; some college, 73 percent; college graduate, 74 percent.

[21]Anecdotal evidence collected by the author in a number of conversations with highly educated individuals suggests that the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal provided strong competition to the Star for readers among high SES groups in Minneapolis, the research setting.

[22]Data were not coded for Sunday Tribune readership only, as opposed to daily Tribune readership only; therefore, it is not possible to separate out readership figures for each. However, inspection of the interview instruments shows that interviewers recorded many respondents in the low education group as specifying that they read only the Sunday edition of the Tribune.

[23]Respondents were asked to name any other newspapers that they read in addition to the neighborhood papers, the daily papers, and the six other publications just described.

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